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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5618

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0285

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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0239

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000764

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/19/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM PINR EAID KPAO MR

SUBJECT: SEVERAL ARRESTED FOR COUP PLOTTING

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(C) Key Points

-- The police here arrested late last night several high ranking military officers and civilians associated with former President Taya, who was overthrown in a bloodless coup last August. One of the officers was still on active duty.

-- No official statements or charges have yet been made, but the arrests almost certainly involve coup plotting, an actual coup attempt, or an active effort to disrupt the imminent national referendum this Sunday, the 25th, on several critically important amendments to Mauritania's constitution.

-- Members of the ruling Military Council, many of whom were spread around the country promoting the referendum, were called back to Nouakchott last night for a special council session.

(C) Comments

-- The streets are calm, the police are not out in any increased presence, and the Embassy has discerned no threat to the Embassy, its personnel, or to the American community stemming from the arrests.

-- The arrests underscore a point repeatedly made in earlier Embassy reporting: Mauritania's current democratic transition is quite fragile and in constant danger of disruption through coup, assassination, or some other exogenous shock to the process.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (C) The Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCJD) last night arrested several high-ranking military officers. The motivation for the arrests is unclear at this time, but is believed to be related either to a coup attempt, coup plotting, or to an effort to disrupt the coming June 25 National Referendum vote.

THE ARRESTS

12. (C) The confirmed arrests include:

- Colonel Sid Mohamed Ould Vaida, former commander of the Second Commando Battalion and a key security player under the Taya government. Vaida was one of five officers arrested following the August 3 coup for his refusal to support the overthrow of Taya. He was later released from custody and fired. Vaida's strong loyalty to Taya was also demonstrated during the 2003 failed coup attempt when Vaida's battalion withstood a tank assault by the coup leaders. Vaida received infantry officer training at Fort Benning, Georgia through the International Military Educational Training Program (IMET).

- Colonel Abderrahmane Ould Lekwar, former Chief of the Navy, and current Navy Technical Advisor to the Chief of the Defense Force.

- Mini Ould Lekwar, cousin of former President Taya and son of Colonel Lekwar.

- General Boukhereiss (and his son (no name currently available)). Boukhereiss was the former Chief of the Defense Force who retired in 2002. He is reportedly the only Mauritanian officer to serve as a General.

- Colonel Chrouf, former Commander of the Headquarters Security Battalion.

- Colonel Riha, former Chief of Staff of the National Gendarmerie.

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- Mohamed Ould Mohamed Aly, former Mauritanian Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris, who had also served as a diplomat in Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

13. (C) The unconfirmed arrests:

- Sid'Brahim Hamdinou, former director of Radio Mauritania (the government owned radio station).

- Ould El Hadj El Mokhtar, president of "Democrats without Boarders," an NGO that supports the return of Taya through its website.

14. (C) Mauritanian military sources indicate that the government is currently looking for Colonel Arby, the former Chief of the Defense Force, who was arrested and later released and fired following the August 2005 coup.

15. (C) These same military sources said that the arrests occurred after the government received information that many of these individuals had recently met to discuss ways to disrupt the coming Referendum.

16. (C) The common thread among the arrests appears to be close familial and tribal ties to former president Taya.
Embassy Comment. Those arrested were close to Taya, or at a minimum, would profit from his return. End Comment.

17. (C) Beyond the eight confirmed arrests, it is unknown how many others were taken into custody. Some reports place the number as high as 20, and the numbers could go even higher.

SPECULATIONS

18. (C) Last nights events have been reported on the government owned radio station, and have begun to appear in local online journals, but the government has not yet made an official statement. Rumors have spread of coup attempts and

plotting, including plans for the assassination of Colonel Fal.

¶ 9. (C) Embassy sources have been reluctant to discuss the events over the phone, and have instead requested meetings in-person. Post will report any substantive findings from these meetings.

LeBaron